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SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y--(DAES CHANGED)

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/W (DBANKS), AF/RSA (MBITTRICK) AND AF/EX (VREYNOLDS)
PARIS FOR D'ELIA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: BENIN: LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS SET FOR MARCH 25, 2007; GOB
LOOKING FOR HELP FUNDING THEM

11. (U) SUMMARY: Benin's Council of Ministers on December 9 set the date for the upcoming legislative elections as March 25, 2007. This launches official preparations for the fifth legislative elections in Benin since the democratic transition in 1990. With just over three and a half months to go, the government and National Assembly still need to name the members of the Independent National Election Commission (CENA), and set the electoral budget. The Minister of Justice has asked donors to a meeting on December 15 to discuss possible aid for the process. END SUMMARY.

ELECTION DATE SET

12. (U) Back in June, the Yayi government resisted efforts by the National Assembly to revise Benin's Constitution and extend the current legislative term for a fifth year. A large majority of Assembly members argued that such an extension would save money by allowing legislative and municipal elections to be combined in 2008. The Yayi government countered that adequate funding was already available for the legislative elections. The Assembly went ahead and adopted an amendment, but this amendment was rejected by the Constitutional Court, keeping Benin on track for legislative elections in spring 2007. On December 9, the Government announced that the vote would be held on March 25, 2007.

THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY EXAMINES BILLS TO AMEND ELECTORAL LAW

13. (U) With the date now set, election preparations must proceed quickly. A local newspaper reports the Assembly's leadership met on December 11 to discuss issues relating to the upcoming legislative election. The President of the National Assembly reportedly said that his institution would move quickly to review pending legislation on the electoral rules (proposed changes include a reduction in the number of CENA members and an increase in the number of legislative seats from 83 to 93). Any such changes would need to be enacted in the coming days. The current electoral law requires that the members of the CENA need to be named at least ninety days prior to an election, i.e. by Christmas day.

YAYI URGES SUPPORTERS TO FORM AN ELECTORAL COALITION

14. (SBU) An Embassy contact has told us that President Yayi met recently with the main political parties supporting him, and asked them to form an electoral coalition to combine their support in the upcoming legislative election. The contact said talks are underway

among the parties, but it is still unclear whether competing interests and rivalries can be subordinated for a common campaign.

AND THE GOVERNMENT LOOKS FOR EXTERNAL FUNDING

15. (SBU) Also on December 11, the Minister of Justice (who had assured the legislature earlier this year that adequate funds would be found to finance elections) sent a letter to donors, asking us to attend a meeting on December 15 to discuss "how to mobilize support of diverse partners for the successful conduct of the elections." The UNDP Resident Representative told the Charge on December 13 that UNDP has already established a Common Fund for elections assistance, similar to that set up for the March 2006 presidential elections (to which the US contributed \$325,000 in ESF money). So far, the fund has two contributions, 700,000 euros from the Netherlands, and USD 200,000 from UNDP.

HOLTZAPPLE